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**QUESTIONS  
OF THE DAY**

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**THE REVIVAL OF ANTI-SEMITISM**

**By Felix Adler**

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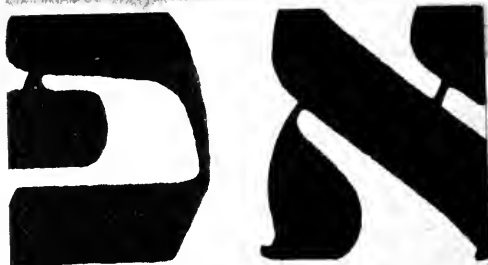
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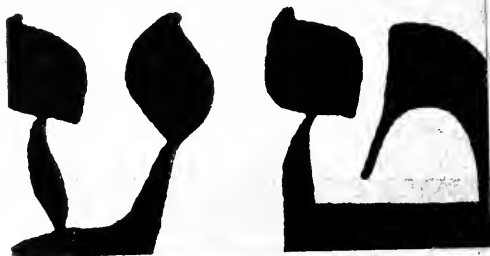
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# THE REVIVAL OF ANTI-SEMITISM\*

By FELIX ADLER

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Why anti-Semitic and not anti-Jewish? Anti-Semitic propaganda is as virulent as plain Jew-baiting ever was. Why the new name? It is not really designed to soften antipathy, but rather to give it a larger setting, a quasi-scientific legitimation. The Semitic group of peoples, including the ancient Babylonians, Syrians and Arabs, as well as the Hebrews, were Asiatics. The implication of the name anti-Semitism is that the descendants of the ancient Hebrews, the Jews, have remained deeply-dyed Asiatics, Oriental interlopers in Western countries, an alien, uncongenial element in the population that ought of right to be extruded. I shall examine this opinion in the course of my address, but so much for the name.

The more recent revival of anti-Jewish hostility (call it anti-Semitism for brevity's sake if you will), dates back to the 'eighties of the last century. The movement at that time was deliberately fostered for political ends. It was "made in Germany" by Bismarck when he broke with the National Liberals and their Jewish leader Lasker, and was used, as is generally believed, to inflame Teutonic nationalism, and to discredit liberalism in general by turning popular feeling against its Jewish exponents. But it was also made in Russia, where frightful excesses accompanied it, with the deliberate intent of heading off the revolutionary tendencies that were even then threatening the autocratic system of government by directing the restless discontent of the Russian people against the Jews.

The anti-Semitic movement in France, which culminated in the notorious Dreyfus affair, was likewise artificially stimulated in the interest of a militaristic and clerical intrigue aiming at a monarchical restoration.

But politicians cannot actually make movements. They can only astutely avail themselves of tendencies already in existence; they can fan fires that are smouldering beneath the ashes; they can add fuel to the flames; they can provoke explosions like the

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\* An address delivered before the New York Society for Ethical Culture, Sunday, December 5, 1920.

pogroms; they can let loose ferocious instincts that are latent in the crowd. And if we would understand what has happened, and what is again happening, we must probe beneath the surface, and search out the continuous causes of that feeling against the Jews which has been prevalent during so many centuries. And when we do this we are forced to recognize rather painfully that the world is not so far along as over-sanguine optimists had supposed. The fighting instinct is still as active as ever. The exploitation of the weak by the strong has hardly become more merciful; and certain other crude instincts which men today have inherited from their primeval ancestors seem not to have abated their force.

Of these primeval instincts which I allude to as pertinent to the subject we are discussing, the first is racial antipathy, due to the animosity felt towards persons of different language or different social habits, or both. Uneducated people despise foreigners. A foreign language to their ears is a ridiculous jargon. They also distrust and are easily led to hate those whose mental outlook is at all different from their own. Contrariwise, it is the mark of high culture not only to tolerate but to welcome and appreciate unlikeness in others. The Jews, perhaps, are peculiarly sensitive to the hostility which they often arouse. But they are not the only victims, for in fact such racial antipathies crop up all over the earth, as for instance between Czechs and Germans in Bohemia, between Poles and Ruthenians, between Turks and Armenians, between the Chinese and Japanese, and so on without end.

The second primitive tendency that plays a prominent part in the phenomena we are considering is what may be called the scape-goat tendency; or, to put my idea more precisely, the tendency to ascribe to personal agents what is really the effect of complex causes. The average mind as yet is a pot of very small calibre, and by no means a pot of gold, but rather filled with a good deal of dross. The average human brain is a rude mechanism, fit to turn out gross fabrics, but not to spin and weave the finer silken threads of thought. The average human mind, outside of the round of daily experience, is unaccustomed to trace effects back to their causes, and in their stead invents personal, and usually evil or diabolical agents. Thus in primitive times every disease was ascribed to demoniac possession. The causes of disease being far from simple and frequently obscure, the theory of demoniac pos-



session was resorted to by way of explanation. The sickness is just caused by a devil inside the man. Nothing could be simpler. Drive out the devil and the man will be cured. And this primitive tendency does not disappear in the course of human history. In the Middle Ages, at the time when the Black Plague swept over Europe, carrying off twenty-five million of its inhabitants, the lack of the most elementary hygienic precautions, the foul, unsanitary conditions, that prevailed in the castles of the nobles as well as in the hovels of the poor,—in a word, the *causes*, were not known, were not observed. But the personal agents who were answerable for the pestilence were easily discovered. The Jews were the malevolent foes of the human race that had produced the calamity. They had poisoned the wells, and nothing more needed to be said.

And now, in the twentieth year of the twentieth century, the same unspeakably crude disposition to substitute personal agency for causes once again manifests itself. There is widespread unrest in the world. Society is stirred to its depths. The laboring masses are in commotion. The smaller nationalities as well as the great powers are at odds. There is unparalleled economic distress. Millions are starving in Europe. Forty millions are threatened with starvation in China. Arabia is agitated; India palpitates with suppressed revolt. The baleful star of Bolshevism has risen, and shows as yet no sign of setting. The causes are manifold and intricate. But the desire to find some individual or some group upon whose devoted head the total sin of mankind may be devolved, to whose malevolent efficacy the universal woe may be ascribed, is again to the fore, and a book has just been published in this city, entitled *The Cause of World Unrest*, which has discovered the scapegoat, and proposes to hold him up to reprobation. It is the Jews who are the authors of all this mischief. A group of Jews, it is solemnly declared, have been secretly working for centuries to throw all Christendom into confusion, to embroil the nations with one another, and to poison this time, not the wells, but the minds of the peoples. And to what end? In order to destroy the Christian religion, and indeed all religions except the Jewish, and in order to found, on the ruins of our existing civilization, the universal monarchy of a descendant of King David.

The document which forms the basis of this fantastic accusation is the so-called protocols of the so-called Elders of Zion. The Elders of Zion are purely fictitious personages that exist nowhere save in the imagination of the writer of the protocols. And the protocols themselves are a rather lamentable fabrication. They were brought to light by a certain Russian named Nilus, who had them from a lady of unknown name, who in turn received them from a mysterious individual. That any sane person should pay attention to a document with no better authentication than that it was received from a lady of unknown name, and in turn from a mysterious individual, seems incredible, especially when it is a document that launches a terrible indictment against a whole people,—or if not against the people in their entirety, against their leaders.

Of course it is admitted by the London *Morning Post*, which makes use of the protocols, that there is no external evidence in support of their authenticity. Why then treat the document as if it were important? Why conjure up a supposed Jewish peril on the basis of it? Because of the internal evidence, it is said. Now I hold that to prove that there is internal evidence of the actual or possible truth of the accusation, it would have been necessary to compare the mentality manifested in the protocols with the Jewish mentality as expressed in the history and the age-long literature of the Jewish people. There it lies, open to inspection. There are reflected the mental and moral characteristics of the Jews, their aspirations and ambitions, their intellectuality, their practicality, their ecstatic mysticism. I venture to say that any one who makes the comparison between the Machiavellianism, the cruelty, the stupid intrigue, ascribed to the Jews in the document, and their actual characteristics as revealed in their history and literature, will discover, not agreement, but the exact contrary; the sort of mentality that is imprinted on the protocols is, if anything, that of Russian autocracy, the mentality of the Jews is totally different.

But then it is said there is the “uncanny correspondence” between the plot as outlined in the protocols and Trotzky, Zinoviev and the rest of the Jewish Bolsheviks! Suggestion has a powerful effect on belief. Suggest a thing often enough, and by and by the unthinking will accept it as a fact. But is there this uncanny

correspondence? Is there any correspondence at all? Briefly, the fictitious Elders of Zion are supposed to have planned to create universal unrest. For what purpose? In order to destroy the Christian and every other religion and to exalt the Jewish faith. But Trotzky and the others are materialists, and indifferent or hostile to every religion, the Jewish among the rest. And again, the general chaos is to be the prelude to the creation of a Jewish monarchy. But Trotzky and the rest are Communists. The protocols propose a new society based on the recognition of castes; Trotzky and the rest are levelers. Where then is the correspondence, uncanny or otherwise? There is instead a total absence of correspondence. To assert that the Jewish Bolsheviks are secretly aiming, in connivance with the suppositious Elders of Zion, at universal dominion under a prince of the House of David, and at the sole exaltation of the Jewish faith, is a perfectly gratuitous assumption. There is not a straw of evidence to warrant it. All the evidence points the other way.

But there must be a motive. I mean a motive on the part of the London *Morning Post* that has actuated it in making use of these pitiful protocols and alarming the world, under the guise of a severe and impartial desire to know the truth, with the scarecrow of a Jewish conspiracy. The motive, I am afraid, is not far to seek. The whole thing looks very much like a piece of reactionary propaganda. For, observe that the attack is directed not against the Jews alone, but against Continental Freemasonry, especially the Grand Orient, against the League of Nations, against Mr. Wilson ("Wilsonism has much in common with Bolshevism"), and against liberalism in general. The object appears to be to discredit liberalism by associating it with Bolshevism, and to intensify the hatred against Bolshevism by representing the Jews as its authors. The circumstance that certain Jews, Mr. Montagu, Sir Alfred Mond, and Lord Reading, are mentioned by name, gives color to the suspicion that influences connected with English politics may also have operated. As to the reason why this same propaganda is at present conducted in America, the protest of the Jewish societies of this city, recently published in the newspapers, assigns as its motive the attempt to drive a wedge between the Jewish citizens in America and their fellow-citizens. I find this reason, if I may say so, not altogether convincing.

The more probable object seems to me to be here the same as elsewhere, namely, to serve the purposes of reaction, to disparage liberalism by associating it with Bolshevism, and to intensify the feeling against Bolshevism by incriminating the Jews in connection with it. As public opinion in America at present is a force to be reckoned with in European countries, any movement against the Jews on this side of the water would be helpful in reinforcing the reactionary propaganda abroad.

In finishing this part of my subject I should like to say that it seems to me a mistake to regard Trotzky and his friends as in any sense the originators of the Russian Bolshevik movement. Lenin, according to all accounts, is the head and front of the movement. Trotzky and the others are his lieutenants. It is not indeed surprising that the more radical element among the Russian Jews should be prominent in Bolshevik councils. In the first place, because they have suffered deeply, and even more grievously than others, from the bitter persecution of the autocracy. Then the preponderant majority of the Communists are peasants or manual workers. The number of men of intellectual capacity and training at Lenin's disposal is small. It is therefore natural that he should avail himself of the Jewish talent among his comrades. But to suppose that the Jews are the authors of the Russian revolution, and in this sense responsible for Bolshevism, is quite erroneous. The causes of the Russian revolution are the breakdown of the bureaucratic system, the land-hunger of the peasants, which the bureaucracy refused to satisfy, the war-weariness of the Russian people, and then there is the necessity for some kind of strong government to take the place of that which had disappeared. Some Jews, in virtue of their keen intellectuality, are radicals, others are conservative. The greater number in European countries as well as in America, are if anything too conservative. Stahl (a Jew) was the principal philosopher of conservatism after Hegel in Germany. Beaconsfield was the admired head of the conservative party in England. To hold up the Jews, therefore, as the originators of the world unrest, is absurd. The absurdity is aggravated when we read, in the book I have been discussing, that not only the Russian revolution, but the instability in India, in Egypt, and even in Ireland, is the work of their subtle brains; and the absurdity reaches perhaps its climax when

we learn that they are not only responsible for every restless movement in the world, but are also the authors of the anti-Semitic movement which is directed against their own people. They are provoking the pogroms, etc., in order to whip into line their tardy or unwilling fellow-Jews. The lucubrations of a brain that can invent such fables as these should be recommended to the study of alienists.

We have thus considered several of the causes that account for the continuance of the anti-Jewish prejudice. But would it be fair, in an impartial survey, to omit those traits in the character of the Jews themselves to which exception is taken? The most prominent of these has been the practice of usury, especially in countries of backward economic development. This need not detain us long, as it has been fully and frequently treated. The Church put the taking of interest under its ban absolutely. All Christians were forbidden to lend money at interest. Interest-taking as such was stigmatized as usury. Now in the second half of the Middle Ages, large amounts of capital were needed in order to carry on magnificent building operations, to equip armies, etc. The Jews possessed available capital, which they had accumulated by carrying on the trade in spices, silks, etc., between the Far East and Europe. The capital of the Jews therefore was in great request,—and the Jews, being outside the pale of the Canon Law, were permitted to do what was forbidden to the Christian. In consequence, for a time they were bankers on a large scale. Then they were displaced by the Lombards, and more and more crowded into petty trades and usury,—the more honorable callings being shut against them.

But the practice of usury is not the only accusation, and indeed if I were here undertaking a psychological study, I could myself point to far more fundamental faults in the Jewish character. I think it is a mistake to plead as an apologist for the Jews in the sense of glorifying all their virtues and ignoring their defects. What I do affirm is that we ought to take the French *mot* concerning *les défauts de ses qualités* and *les qualités de ses défauts* literally. What I insistently affirm is that in the character of every people, as of every individual, there are the shadows and the lights, there is the fine side and there is the seamy side of character, and that it is unjust to turn the seamy side upward as

if that told the whole story, precisely as it would be sophomoric to emphasize only the bright side as if the darker under-side did not exist. In every people, to speak roughly, there are; either overt or latent, both a Jekyll and a Hyde. On what then do we base the distinction between the good and the bad? On the fact that in the one case the nobler qualities predominate, in the other case for the time being at least the baser qualities predominate. Apply this to the Jews—apply it to any people. What would you say, for instance, if some one should declare that the French are a cruel, a peculiarly blood-thirsty people? Witness Robespierre and the Terror. Has there been anything just like the Terror in the history of other nations? Witness the massacre of defenceless prisoners. Witness farther back the horrors of St. Bartholomew's night, the atrocities perpetrated in the days of the Armagnacs. Yes, some one will say, on the strength of this evidence the French are a bloody-minded people. And they are also a lascivious people, witness Paris. Would such a judgment in your opinion be less than scandalous? It is perfectly true that some Frenchmen at some periods of French history have been cruel and bloody-minded. But does that at all warrant the generalization that the French people as a whole are cruel? or that the French are lascivious because the aspect of Paris seen by the tourist may be so? And above all, how can any one who speaks of France forget the magnificent side of the French character and of French history?—the generousities of France, the humanitarian enthusiasms of France, the charm of France, the achievements of France in science, in literature, in the arts?

In a similar fashion one could arouse bitter feeling against England by pointing out all the stains upon her record,—for instance, her contest with Spain in the eighteenth century for the horrible privilege of carrying on the slave trade; her maltreatment of Ireland during so many centuries, and the like,—forgetting that England is the Mother of Parliaments; that we owe to her the foundations of political liberty; that she abolished the slave trade before we did; that her best men and women are eager today to make good, if they can only see a way, the wrongs of the sister island.

Apply the same criterion, I repeat, to the Jews. Have their

valuable qualities predominated? Have they contributed things that are worth while to the civilization of the world? Are they still capable of making such contributions?

And this leads me to allude to the charge to which I referred in the beginning, to which the name anti-Semitism is due, namely that the Jews are Orientals, or Asiatics, who have no place in Western civilization. On the contrary, they are eminently Western-minded. The proof of this can be found admirably summarized in a book by the well-known writer Joseph Jacobs, entitled *Jewish Contributions to Civilization*. It is no exaggeration to say that they are eminently Western-minded, because they have so largely assisted in building up Western civilization. Mathematics is the foundation on which rest the physical sciences. Jewish mathematicians brought the Indian arithmetic and geometry to the knowledge of the West. Jewish astronomers took a conspicuous part in preparing the astronomical tables that serve for navigation. The tables used by Columbus on his voyage were compiled by Zucato, the Jewish astronomer to the King of Portugal. The quadrant used by Columbus was invented by the Jew Gersonides. The two most distinguished Jewish philosophers were Maimonides in the twelfth century and Spinoza in the seventeenth. Maimonides profoundly influenced the writings of the great scholastics, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas. The widely radiating influence of Spinoza, down to the present day, not only in philosophy, but in literature, requires no comment. Nor is it necessary to expatiate on the outburst of Jewish talent in the last one hundred years, as evidenced in every one of the physical sciences, in philology, in history, etc. The point I am considering is: Are the Jews Western-minded or not? Is their mentality congenial to that of the Western nations? As proof, I cite the fact of their great participation in erecting the intellectual framework of Western civilization. Again, they are Western in their loyalties. Goldwin Smith in conversation once expressed to me his misgivings lest in case of strain the clan feeling of the Jews might overcome their patriotic feelings. The late war has shown to an extraordinary degree that the national feeling of the Jews in all countries has overcome their racial feelings.

But if we desire to understand the spirit of a people in its depths,

we must inquire as to its religion. Have the Jews in religion shown themselves alien or congenial to the Western nations? Here certainly the facts speak loudly. The Hebrew Bible is the fountain from which the Western peoples have drawn their inspiration in religion. Open the Roman Breviary or the Book of Common Prayer, and you will find them stocked with the religious poetry of the Hebrew psalmists. Although attempts were made from time to time by certain Christian sects to eliminate the Old Testament from the Bible, leaving only the New, such attempts were always discountenanced. In the eyes of the Church the Old Testament is the indispensable foundation of the New. But if this is so, we may ask,—Why did the Church turn so bitterly against the very people from whom it had inherited its sacred Scripture? Why did the Church permit the long-continued persecution of the Jews? Why did it excite the hatred of the masses against the kinsmen of Jesus and the Apostles? And when we recapitulate the factors that are responsible for the anti-Jewish prejudice, the widespread antagonism against the Jew, are we not compelled to set down the hostility of the Church, the influence of the Church, as one of the principal factors? How explain the paradox: reverence for the Bible of the Jews, worship of the Redeemer, the Savior, who sprang from the Jews, and bitter persecution of the surviving Jews? The paradox is easily resolved. The Church included the Old Testament in its Bible because it contained the texts prophesying the Messiah. The Church declared that these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. The prevailing Jewish Orthodox opinion has been that the prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, that the Messiah is still to be expected. This difference of viewpoint accounts for the attitude of the Church toward the Jewish people. They were never to be entirely annihilated,—persecution must never be allowed to go so far. On the contrary, they were to be preserved as necessary witnesses to the prophecies. But they were also to be penalized and to suffer because they refused to believe in the fulfillment. Nevertheless, the coincidence of the two faiths in the evaluation of the Old Testament, the fact that the Western nations were spiritually nourished on the Psalms and prophetic writings of the Hebrews, bears upon the point I am here discussing, the congeniality of the Jewish and Western minds. In



truth, the New Testament itself is in large measure a product of the Hebrew mind.

I should like to go a step farther and say that for my part I do recognize a profound difference between the Hebrew attitude in religion and the religious attitude of Christendom. The Hebrew soul as manifested in religion is wholly prepossessed with the infinitude of the infinite, the unattainable height of the moral ideal as represented in the Deity. True, man is said to be the image of God, but the distance between the image and the sublime original is unbridgable. The Christian affirmation in religion is that the Divine is capable of inhabiting human nature, that man is capable of becoming identified with God. Now so long as these differences are expressed in rigid doctrines, they are mutually exclusive; but when freed from their doctrinal integuments and expressed in terms of ethical aspiration they are not opposite but supplementary. The infinite is ever the unattainable, and yet it is also that towards which man can forever aspire, even if in his finite existence he will never become wholly identified with it.\*

In its progress toward the far-off moral ideal, as I said in the beginning, the human race is still in the early stages. The innocent victims of war and exploitation will still have to suffer, and the objects of prejudice will not be able, in a generation or two, to wear off the stigma. The world was not made for man to be at ease in. Why should the modern Jew refuse to bear his share of the burden the full heaviness of which his ancestors carried for two thousand years with such invincible spiritual resistance?

I have put before you some of the crude instincts and tendencies that operate in creating this prejudice: the fear and distrust of whatever is unlike, the inability to comprehend processes and

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\* It may be held by some that Zionism, the drift back toward Palestine, which is in Asia, supports the contention of anti-Semitism that the Jews are Orientals. I have stated elsewhere the reasons for my dissent from Zionism, but all the same it seems to me that Zionism, if I understand it rightly, is a movement especially inspired by Western ideas. It is taking back to Palestine the latest Western science, the latest Western improvements in agriculture, the latest engineering, the latest city planning, the latest ideas in education. And if it also seeks to repristinate the prophetic ideal, it does so in so far as the ideal of the Hebrew prophets is in part the source, in any case in agreement with, the Western ideals of liberty and fraternity.

causes, and hence the disposition to ascribe calamity to malignant personal agents, the crude habit of seeing people wholly black or white, and especially of seeing the seamy side and ignoring the nobler qualities. But there is one other mischievous habit of morally undeveloped persons which I must mention before I conclude my remarks.

It is the habit of identifying an individual with the real or imaginary traits of the group to which he belongs, and generally with the traits characteristic of the baser members of that group, instead of accepting or rejecting him on the ground of his own merits. And here we put our fingers on the very tap-root of prejudice, especially as it shows itself in social discrimination. Social discrimination on the ground of differences in degree of culture and refinement is not only permissible but indispensable. The well-bred cannot be asked to associate, at any rate at close range, with the ill-bred, the refined with the vulgar, the educated with the raw and half-illiterate. Although it should be distinctly added that the respect which is due to every human being as such may in no instance be violated. But social discrimination against cultured and refined persons in consequence of prejudice seems to me inexcusable.

Prejudice works harm in both directions,—to the objects of it, and to those who entertain it. The objects of prejudice, when sensitive, are led to shrink back within racial lines, and are apt to lose that sureness in intercourse, that open frankness in approaching others, which is the sign of manliness; while the vulgar, contrariwise, are led to exhibit a kind of insolent defiance and unlovely self-assertion. But those who entertain the prejudice are no less harmed. It has been truly said that no one can shut out other folks without shutting himself in, and shutting himself in often within very narrow and narrowing bounds. Prejudice is a fetter fastened upon the personality that prevents its free expansion. It is a sign of moral backwardness. For it is true, sadly true, and a truth to be remembered, that persons otherwise highly intellectual and refined in manner may yet be morally backward.

And how should the prejudice be met? When Plato was told that men spoke evil of him, he answered, I must then so live that they will be compelled to change their tune. To live on benefi-

cently, positively, unvexed by the maladjustments that still exist, is the only way. The person against whom the prejudice exists is bound to be the spiritual helper of those who entertain the prejudice. It is said that malignant growths on the body are now cured by certain rays. Prejudice is a kind of malignant growth in the soul. Let your radiations be such as to effect the cure.

But the best help that we can gain on this subject is to realize the change that is going on in the world, the opportunity and need of world-wide reconstruction. The architects of reconstruction are calling loudly for helpers. Be one of the helpers. If you are engrossed in that task, you will not have time to think of the minor frictions of life, the personal inconveniences. Let not the Jewish question loom so large in your mind as to obscure the world questions. Fit yourself to do your share. Aspire to excellence. Excellence is convincing. Be eminently useful; nothing can then prevent you from being eminently welcome.

But especially there is need, as every one who has fathomed the malady of our day realizes, of a new moral ideal to guide mankind in its task of reconstruction, a new plan according to which to reshape the relations of men and of peoples. We need more light, we need a new ideal. And to this ideal each stock, each race, can contribute. There is not, there cannot be, a single Chosen Race. There is not, there cannot be, a monopoly of spiritual truth and insight. The pride of synagogue and church in this respect at last must be laid aside. There are chosen spirits, spiritually-minded personalities in every people, and these must co-operate in religion. And therefore I, born of the Jews, reverent to my ancestry, must seek to contribute the gifts of my race, if I can, to the new ideal. But I must also, standing where I do, stretch out my hand in fellowship to men and women of other gifts and heritages. For I need what they can give, as they perchance may need what I can offer. Not a few have already answered my appeal, others will. To Jew and Gentile I speak, and say: Let us join together in the endeavor to create the most wonderful thing to which the human mind can give birth, the holy vision—holier than any that the past has known—that shall guide mankind through its sorrows and its labors towards the better time to come. This is the sense and purpose of our

Ethical Movement. And in this, among ourselves and those whom we can reach, will be finally transcended the thing that is called anti-Semitism.

It is said that when the dawn breaks, the spectral apparitions that have flitted through the fearsome night must hie them back to their graves. My friends, the dawn is breaking in the world, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Let the ghosts of the buried past return to their graves.



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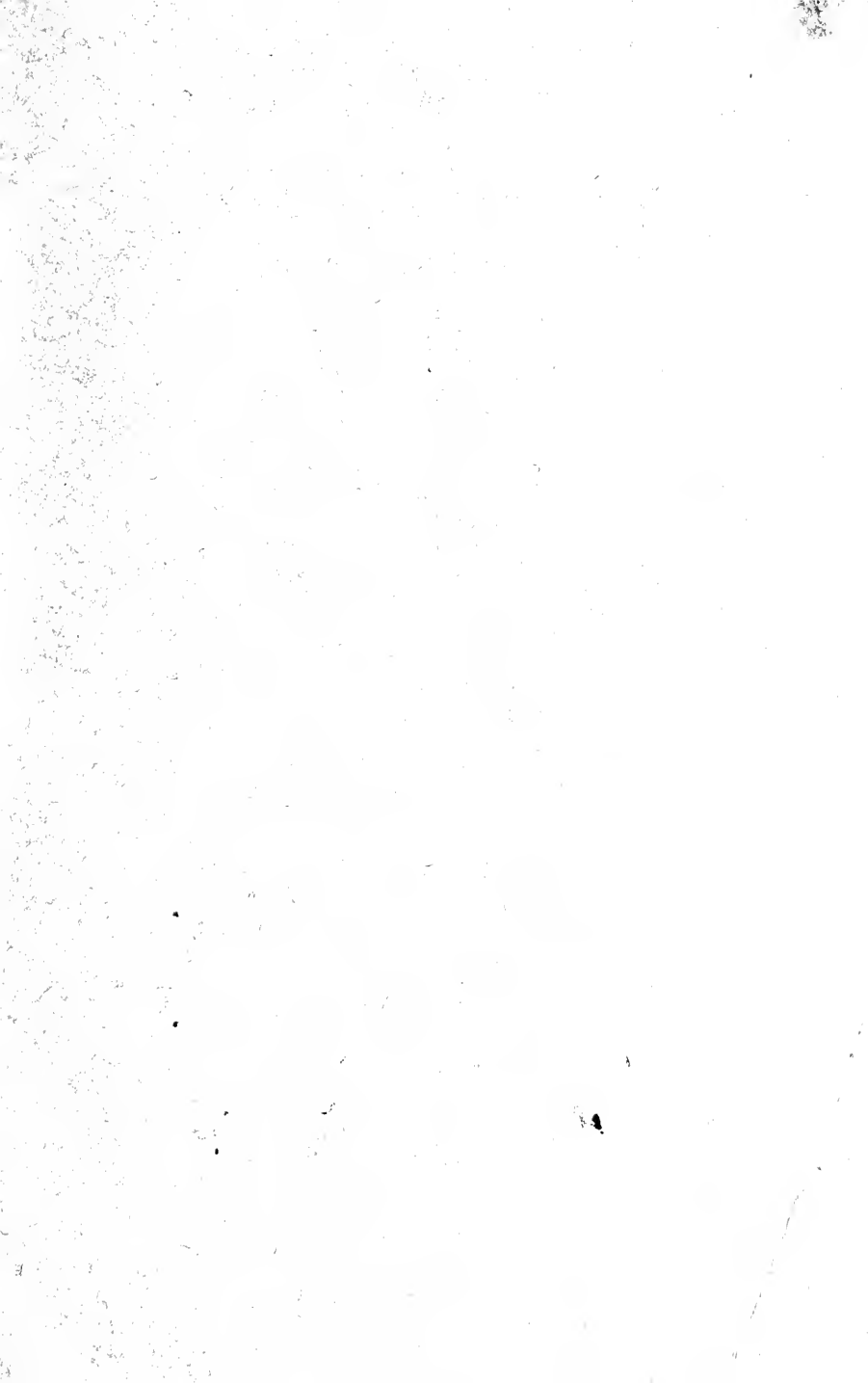
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